

# **Testimony of State Representative Steve Wieckert**

## **Assembly Bill 690 – Neighborhood Watch Harassment**

*Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice  
Room 225 Northwest – January 30, 2008*

Good morning Chairman Kleefisch and committee members. I am pleased to come before you today to discuss Assembly Bill 690, Neighborhood Watch Harassment.

This bill provides a penalty for anyone harassing a citizen who is trying to protect and preserve the quality of their neighborhoods when participating in Neighborhood Watch activities, coordinated by local law enforcement agencies.

Crime seems to be on the rise in areas around Wisconsin for activities such as: property theft, vandalism, drug dealing, groups fighting in public areas, and bullying of children at play in parks and on their way to and from school. This clearly is not the Wisconsin way. These are difficult types of crimes to catch in the act, especially by law enforcement because they cannot be everywhere at once.

More and more citizens are becoming involved in Neighborhood Watch groups to help meet these challenges. They help to be the eyes and ears of local law enforcement agencies by helping to report these problems. Volunteers have expressed a concern about being adequately protected as they engage in these activities to help preserve the quality of their neighborhoods where they may have lived for many years. They deserve our protection.

This bill provides an additional level of protection for those citizen volunteers who are helping law enforcement officials fight crime.

Florida has a model neighborhood watch law which includes this harassment provision and is working well.

This bill is supported by the:

- Wisconsin Troopers Association
- Milwaukee Police Association
- Wisconsin Crime Prevention Practitioners Association
- Milwaukee Deputy Sheriffs Association
- Wisconsin Alliance of Cities Inc
- Wisconsin County Police Association

Thank you. At this time I would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.



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November 30, 2007

Representative Steve Wieckert  
Room 16 West State Capitol  
P.O. Box 8953  
Madison, WI 53708-8953

Dear Representative Wieckert:

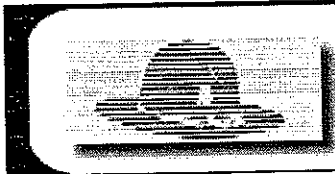
On behalf of the approximately 1,700 law enforcement officers in the Milwaukee Police Association (MPA) please accept this correspondence as our support for the proposed legislation relating to harassment of a person who is part of a neighborhood crime watch program and providing a penalty.

Sincerely,

MILWAUKEE POLICE ASSOCIATION

Thomas E. Fischer  
Vice President  
Local #21, IUPA, AFL-CIO

TEF/cmj



## Wisconsin Troopers' Association

Casey Perry – Executive Director

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TO: Representative Steve Wieckert

FR: Casey Perry

DA: December 3, 2007

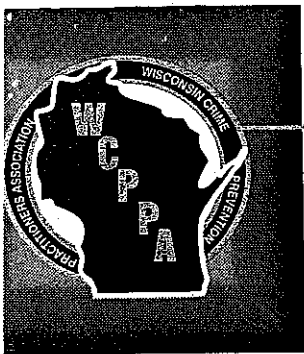
RE: Support for LRB-3380/1

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The Wisconsin Troopers Association (WTA) supports LRB-3380/1, making a person who harasses, intimidates or subjects another to physical contact is guilty of a misdemeanor if the victim is a member of a neighborhood crime watch program and is engaged in activities related to the program. This common sense legislation is good public policy.

Neighborhood watch programs play an integral role in the community. The WTA supports citizens who are attempting to better their neighborhood safety and security by taking part in neighborhood watch programs. Citizens ought to be able to take part in these programs without fear of retribution. Increasing the penalty for anyone who interferes with these efforts by making physical contact or other forms of intimidation will help ensure continued participation by Good Samaritan citizens in these types of programs. Enacting this legislation will preserve the strong partnership between law enforcement and neighborhood watch groups, and continued neighborhood watch success.

Thank you for your leadership and insight. Feel free to contact Annie Early at 414-405-1050 with any questions or concerns about our position. Thank you.



# Wisconsin Crime Prevention Practitioners Association

325 S. Broadway • De Pere, WI 54115 • 920-339-8070

December 21, 2007

To Whom It May Concern:


As President of the Wisconsin Crime Prevention Practitioners Association with a membership of over one hundred plus crime prevention officers, community policing officers, loss prevention personal, citizen crime coalitions and others I am writing in support of Representative Steve Wiecek's Assembly Bill LRB-3380.

It is imperative that we preserve and enhance the neighborhoods we live in. Citizen who volunteer there time to work with law enforcement personal to make there neighborhoods safe and secure from crime need to feel they are making a difference and protected by the law working with law enforcement. 2007 Assembly Bill -3380 addresses these issues. Citizens who care about there communities and neighborhoods are the catalyst in the neighborhood watch efforts to reduce crime and drug activities in there neighborhoods. If citizens are harassed or intimidated because they report crime or suspicious activity in there neighborhoods, they will stop being the eyes and ears of law enforcement. We need citizens to get involved and this bill holds those who harass citizen volunteers accountable.

Having worked in the crime prevention field since 1995 and in law enforcement since 1978 it is my belief that neighborhood watch program participants get involved to help reduce crime in there neighborhoods. We educate them in being good reporters, report suspicious activity and other possible illegal activity. We do not teach them to take the law into there own hands, but it does happen. Legislation such as this will only strengthen neighborhood watch programs throughout Wisconsin.

We thank Representative Wiecek for introducing this legislation and taking a tough stance against crime. Working to make our communities throughout Wisconsin a safe place to live and work, and play is the goal we all strive to achieve.

Crime Prevention Coordinator Deputy Steven L. Herman

  
President, Wisconsin Crime Prevention Practitioners Association  
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## **HB 511 / SB 1410 – 2004 Session Neighborhood Crime Watch Bill Talking Points**

This bill will authorize the establishment of neighborhood crime watch programs within a county or municipality by the county sheriff or municipal police department and allow residents and business owners located within the county or municipality to participate in the programs.

It will also provide a penalty by making it unlawful for any person to harass, harm and/or threaten any member of a neighborhood crime watch program with the intent to intimidate or retaliate against the member for his or her involvement with the neighborhood crime watch program and it will define the term harass.

- Constituent driven.
- Supported by Tampa Police Department and Jacksonville Sheriff's Office.
- Drug Dealers and other Hoodlums were harassing and sometimes beating them.



Carroll's priorities included a bill enabling law enforcement agencies to establish Neighborhood Crime Watch programs and making it a crime for people to harass program participants.

"When I heard some of the horror stories of Neighborhood Crime Watch members being harassed and harmed, I just couldn't say no," Carroll said. "This law will go a long way in protecting citizens who are advocates for crime-free communities."

Gibson is being credited with helping save the state's Displaced Homemakers program, a \$2.3 million program which serves 4,700 Floridians but was eliminated in Gov. Jeb Bush's proposed budget. Launched in 1976, the program offers job-training skills for unemployed men or women who are at least 35 years old and either separated from, divorced, widowed or married to a disabled spouse. Ninety-nine percent of the program's participants are women. Approved bills become law 60 days after the Legislature adjourns or when the governor signs them.

**Crime watcher protection passes test**

St. Petersburg Times (Florida)

August 25, 2004 Wednesday

South Pinellas Edition

**SECTION: CITY & STATE; Pg. 1B**

**BYLINE: SHANNON COLAVECCHIO-VAN SICKLER**

**BODY:**

Greg Barnhill and Christie Hess had been watching the group of male prostitutes for hours, following the men as they walked up and down Nebraska Avenue with their tight clothes and blush-covered cheeks.

The prostitutes gathered in the parking lot of the Orange Motel in Seminole Heights, so Barnhill parked his dark blue Ford Explorer at a cantina restaurant on the other side of Nebraska Avenue.

As the men taunted and cursed them, Hess and Barnhill sat there, sending a silent message with the sign attached to the Explorer: Old Seminole Heights Crime Watch.

"Then one of them picked up a big chunk of rock and hurled it at us, narrowly missed us," said Hess, 42, a longtime Seminole Heights resident who spends almost every weekend night on crime watch duty.

"That's when we called 911 and screamed for help."

Police arrested the rock thrower, Tavares Davis, that early morning of July 4. The case culminated this week with a history-making conviction and sentence.

Less than two months after the implementation of a state law that makes it a misdemeanor to harass neighborhood crime watch members, Davis on Monday became the first person in Hillsborough County to be convicted.

To the delight of those in the Old Seminole Heights Crime Watch, Judge Joelle Ober sentenced Davis, 25, to the maximum: 364 days in the county jail.

Davis was originally charged only with assault, and would have been sentenced to no more than a couple months in jail if convicted. But prosecutor Tom Palermo saw the case as a chance to test the new legislation, said state attorney's office spokeswoman Pam Bondi.

"This is wonderful, wonderful," Hess said. "This sends a very loud and clear message that they better not harass us. I applaud the judge, and I hope the other judges follow suit."

The law took effect July 1, just three days before Tampa police arrested Davis, whose jail records list an address in Archer, in Alachua County. He has a history of arrests on prostitution and violence charges.

Tampa police Capt. Sophia Teague worked with legislators for four years, and it finally passed in the last legislative session.

Teague for years heard crime watch members complain about threats and harassment from the people they tried to push out of their neighborhoods. Having this first case make its way through the courts so quickly is encouraging, she said.



"Now I know it's not just police and the neighborhood watch supporting this, but that the state attorney's office is behind us, too," Teague said. "These residents stick their neck out to try to protect their neighborhoods, but in the past they had nothing in the law to fall back on. Now they know when they're out there, they're protected."

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Barnhill moved to Seminole Heights 13 years ago, before the gentrification boom that has small bungalows selling for more than \$200,000. He has been doing the weekend "hooker patrols," as he calls them, for more than two years.

His Explorer and his wallet have the dents to prove it.

Male prostitutes, one of them 6 feet tall and close to 200 pounds, have thrown bricks at his windshield and back windows. One particularly aggressive prostitute walked up to his SUV and ripped off the passenger side mirror.

He paid \$1,000 to repair a back window that was shattered in November, and he spent another \$280 to replace the side mirror, he said. In December another hurled rock left his Explorer with a scratch that he has yet to fix.

"Having had a window broken already, I know what they do, and what they can do," Barnhill said of the prostitutes.

It's not just Seminole Heights residents who face retaliation from those they're trying to push out. Members of the Old West Tampa Neighborhood Association and Crime Watch say they have been threatened by drug dealers and troublesome teens, who vow to burn their houses and throw firecrackers at their dogs.

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The law says it's illegal for anyone to willfully harass, threaten or intimidate an "identifiable member" of a neighborhood crime watch program. That means prosecutors have to prove crime watch members had signs or T-shirts that identified them at the time of the attacks.

The state attorney's office felt confident in the Davis case because Barnhill had signs on his Explorer, and he and Hess wore T-shirts with the Old Seminole Heights crime watch logo, Bondi said.

"Being the new law, everybody wants this first case to be done right the first time," Barnhill said. "Word gets around among them (the prostitutes), and they're definitely going to hear about this. The fact that Davis got a year and not just 30 days, that shows there's some weight to it."

Shannon Colavecchio-Van Sickler can be reached at (813) 226-3373 or [svansickler@sptimes.com](mailto:svansickler@sptimes.com).

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### **Crime Watch Protection Law Finally Becomes A Reality**

July 10, 2004 Saturday  
Tampa Tribune (Florida)  
FINAL EDITION

**SECTION: SOUTH TAMPA; Pg. 3**

**BYLINE: SEAN LENGELL, [slengell@tampatrib.com](mailto:slengell@tampatrib.com)**

**BODY:**

**IT'S A MISDEMEANOR TO HARASS MEMBERS**

TAMPA — When Tampa police Capt. Sophia Teague first approached state Sen. Les Miller about drafting legislation aimed at protecting neighborhood crime watch volunteers, she assumed her idea would face little resistance.

Miller said, "This shouldn't be hard to get passed — this is easy; this is nonpartisan," Teague said.

Four years and a few setbacks later, Teague's dream finally was realized July 1 when the Neighborhood Watch Protection Law took effect.



"It's a big deal," Teague said. "These neighborhood watch people do so much behind the scenes."

The law makes it a misdemeanor to harass, threaten or intimidate an identifiable member of an authorized neighborhood crime watch patrol.

It's the first law of its kind in the nation, according to the National Sheriffs' Association's Neighborhood Watch Program in Alexandria, Va.

Teague began working with Miller on the legislation while serving as a sergeant in the West Tampa and MacFarlane Park areas. Miller introduced the bill last year, but it stalled in the House of Representatives. This year, it easily passed both houses.

"This was a priority bill of ours," Miller said. "It's important to protect these people who protect their neighborhoods."

Although those convicted only face a misdemeanor charge, crime watch activists say the law is a significant tool in helping them stay safe while on patrol.

"This is genuine support from law enforcement," Marilyn Durst, president of the Tampa Neighborhood Crime Watch Association, said. The law "is a powerful message to send to people."

Several Tampa crime watch members have been attacked in recent months.

A man with a prostitution record was arrested in December after he was accused of throwing a concrete block at three crime watch members inside a Ford Explorer on Nebraska Avenue in Seminole Heights.

Derrick Bernard Tucker was convicted in April and sentenced to 15 years in prison.

In March, another man with a history of prostitution arrests, Harvey Jerome Bailey, was arrested and accused of throwing rocks at a crime watch patrol on Nebraska just north of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard. He pleaded guilty Tuesday.

"You're dealing with some people with violent backgrounds who aren't happy we're disrupting their business," said David "Scott" Banghart of the Southeast Seminole Heights Crime Watch Patrol. "The people we are dealing with are becoming more aggressive because we've become more effective as a crime watch."

David West, president of the North Tampa Community Crime Watch and Civic Association, said he hopes the law will help attract new members to crime watch groups.

"A lot of people are afraid to get involved because of retribution by the bad guys," he said.

Reporter Sean Lengell can be reached at (813) 259-7145.

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***Brace Yourself: 135 New Laws In Effect Today***

The Tribune Co. Publishes The Tampa Tribune

Tampa Tribune (Florida)

July 1, 2004 Thursday

**SECTION:** METRO; Pg. 1

**BYLINE:** GARRETT THEROLF, [gtherolf@tampatrib.com](mailto:gtherolf@tampatrib.com)

**BODY:**

Another makes it a misdemeanor to willfully harass, threaten or intimidate an identifiable member of a neighborhood crime watch program — a provision long-sought by Tampa area groups.

Tampa Neighborhood Watch Association President Marilyn Durst said her group had worked to get the law for several years and gained the support of Sen. Les Miller, D-Tampa, who became a key supporter.

Durst said she also had been working with State Attorney Mark Ober to ensure that it is enforced, and she hoped that it would aid